



GRAHAM COUNTY  
TRANSIT FEASIBILITY REVIEW  
WORKING PAPER ONE

February 2007



**with RAE Consultants Inc**

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Cover: Snow on Mount Graham, view from east side. Graham County Chamber of Commerce Photo Gallery.

## INTRODUCTION

Graham County is located on the Old West Highway (U.S. Route 70), approximately 160 miles from Phoenix and 130 miles from Tucson. Major cities include Safford, Thatcher, and Pima. Located in the Gila Valley, the area is mostly high desert plains surrounded by the Gila, Pinaleno, and St. Teresa Mountains. Recent development associated with a major Phelps Dodge expansion and the emergence as a regional shopping and services center, has spurred both population and economic growth. Along with issues associated with population, housing, and building growth, community leaders are committed to addressing other service needs including the opportunity to provide public transportation in the area.

The Arizona Department of Transportation, Public Transportation Division is supporting these local stakeholders by providing assistance to assess the potential for successful transit services in the planning area. This process will include a Feasibility Review to assess the community environment, local interest, and alternatives to providing effective transit services. If a decision is made that there is a viable opportunity to provide transit services, the project will include the development of an Implementation Plan.

- Feasibility Phase will include:
  - Public input process structured to identify, motivate and encourage stakeholders.
  - Key stakeholders will be identified and included in discussions. This will include not only local service programs (seniors, human service agencies, etc.) but also the business community.
  - Identification of transit dependent populations and needs as well as important community connections between activity centers.
  - Potential links will focus on both employee work trips and other customer needs.
  - Opportunities for coordination with current human service and other transit providers will be carefully reviewed and potential private partnerships developed as appropriate.
- Implementation Phase will include:
  - The Implementation Phase will only be initiated if an affirmative decision is made following the Feasibility Phase.
  - All elements of the Implementation Plan will be supportive of the requirements of the Section 5311 and other grant funding programs.
  - The product for this task will be a detailed transportation service plan including elements such as service type, route/schedules/bus stop locations, vehicle number and type, facility needs and other operational elements.
  - Implementation will be supported by a detailed operating plan, budgets, and timetable for implementation, support documents and forms

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The feasibility review includes;

- Chapter One      Introduction to study process
- Chapter Two      Community profile including an overview of major cities and employers.
- Chapter Three      Demographic characteristics focusing on groups that are considered prime target markets for transit services.
- Chapter Four      Estimate of the transit needs of the communities.
- Chapter Five      An overview of organizational, service types, and funding alternatives to providing transit services.
- Chapter Six      Discussion of the major issues and perception of transit needs by community stakeholders.

## CHAPTER II: COMMUNITY PROFILE

Following a period of limited economic activity, Graham County received a significant boost when Phelps Dodge announced that the Dos Pobres and San Juan mines – the first to be built in the United States in more than 30 years – would be opened northeast of Safford in 2006. The career opportunities coupled with the attraction of living in a small-town setting are fueling dynamic growth in Graham County.

Agriculture has traditionally been a mainstay of the region. Cotton is the principal commodity with hay and small grains also being produced. Water is drawn from the Gila River to create over 40,000 acres of irrigated land.

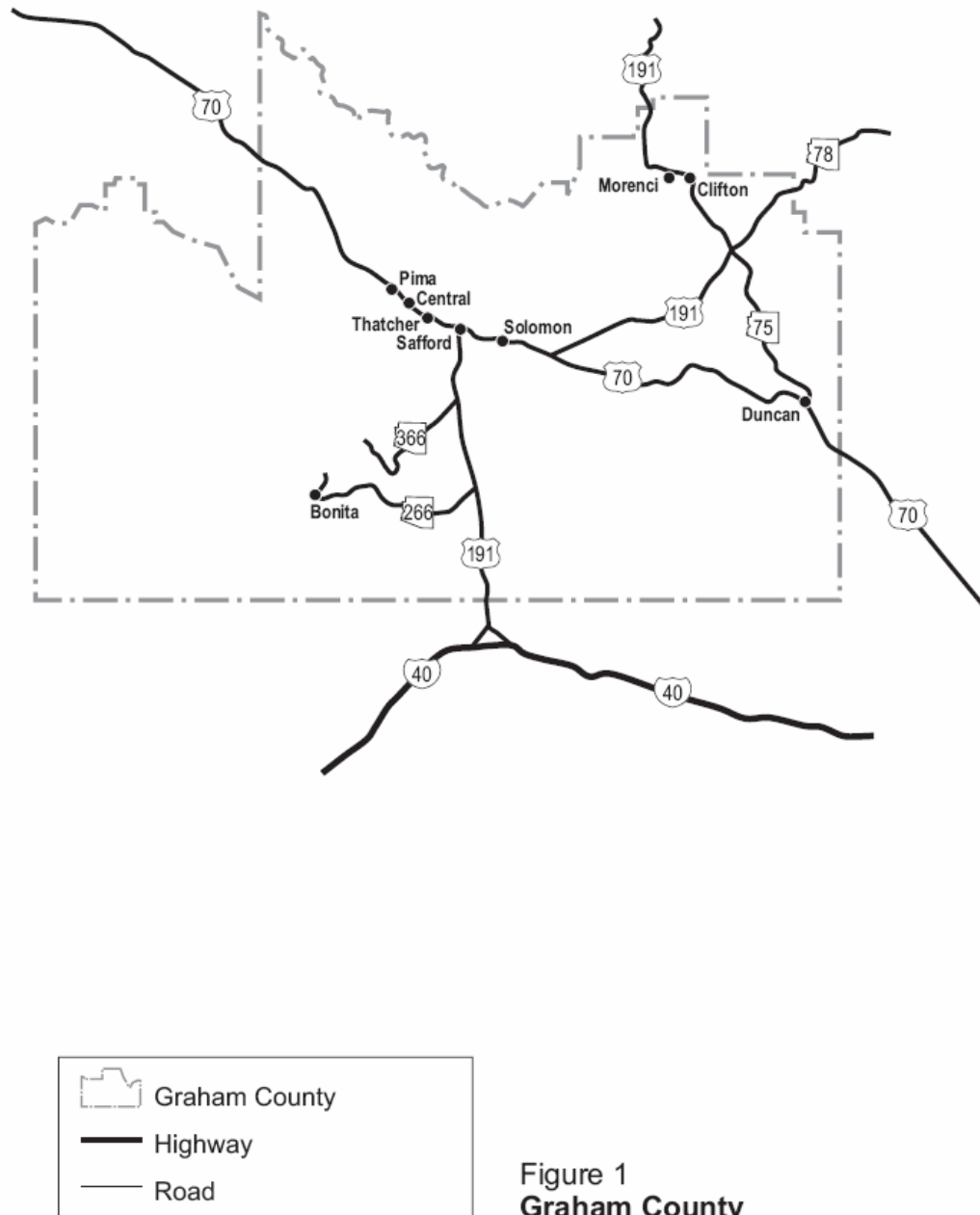
Graham County encompasses 4,630 square miles, including 22 square miles of water. The San Carlos Indian Reservation covers approximately one-third of the land. Individual and corporate ownership accounts for 9.9 percent of land ownership; the U.S. Forest service and Bureau of Land Management, 38 percent; the state of Arizona, 18 percent. The remaining area, 36 percent, is Indian reservations. Major highways include U.S. 70 traversing from Globe to the west and Duncan/Franklin to the east and U.S. Highway 191 from Guthrie/Thatcher connecting to Interstate 10 near Willcox. State Highways 266 and 366 provide access to Coronado National Forest west for U.S. Highway 191. Figure 1 provides an overview of Graham County.

### Major Cities/Employers

Graham County has three nearly contiguous incorporated cities. There are also independent local governmental structures including law enforcement agencies and school districts. Pima, Safford and Thatcher are located on US Highway 70 corridor. The close proximity of the cities makes it difficult to separate employment centers. Major employers that draw employees from all three cities and as well as unincorporated county locations include:

- Arizona State Prison
- Federal Prison Facility
- Bonita Nursery producing tomatoes with 20 acres under glass.
- Phelps Dodge Mining Company
  - Morenci Mine (current operation)
  - Dos Pobres and San Juan Mines (new development)
  - Process Technology Center
  - Central Analytical Services Center
- Eastern Arizona College with the recently completed science and technology centers.
- Mt. Graham Regional Medical Center with expanded cancer and dialysis treatment centers.

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The Town of Pima is located at an elevation of 2,846 feet and has historically been an agricultural center, with irrigation water coming from the Gila River. A farm trade center, Pima serves the surrounding agricultural areas. Pima is becoming a popular retirement community. According to the community profile prepared by the Arizona Department of Commerce, major employers include Ace Aviation, Minit Mart, and the Glen Bar Gin. Major public employers include Graham County Coop, Pima Public Schools, and Pima Town Government.

Safford, the county seat of Graham County, serves as a retail and government center for the region. According to the community profile prepared by the Arizona Department of Commerce, major employers include Mt. Graham Regional Medical Center, the Mt. Graham International Observatory and Impressive Labels. Major public employers include the Safford Unified School District, City of Stafford and Graham County.

At one point over 68% of the land within the corporate limits of Thatcher was used for agricultural purposes. However, retail trade/services/tourism is beginning to play a more significant role in the local economy. In the past three years, a Wal-Mart Super Center and Home Depot were built in Thatcher. According to the community profile prepared by the Arizona Department of Commerce, other major employers include Basha's, Thatcher Building Supply, and Safeway. Major public employers include Eastern Arizona College, Thatcher Public Schools, and the Thatcher Town Government.

Population

In Census 2000, the population of Graham County was reported to have increased 26% over 1990. At that time, the population growth was reported to be relatively flat. However, with the announcement of the Phelps Dodge mine expansion, the area has experienced an influx of workers and their families. Table II-1 provides the population of the three incorporated towns as well as the unincorporated area in Graham County.

TABLE II-1  
Graham County Population

	1990	2000	Increase: 1990 to 2000	2005	Increase: 2000 to 2005
Pima	1,725	1,989	15%	2,085	5%
Safford	7,359	9,232	25%	9,360	1%
Thatcher	3,763	4,022	7%	4,550	13%
Subtotal:	12,847	15,243	19%	15,995	5%
Unincorporated	13,707	18,246	33%	19,460	7%
County Total:	26,554	33,489	26%	35,455	6%

Sources: Arizona Department of Economic Security and U.S. Census Bureau

According to a report by Wick Communications Area in Focus, it is predicted that 7,000 people will move into the Gila Valley by 2010 to support Phelps Dodge mine



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construction and peripheral services. A significant increase in the number of retirement communities is also anticipated.

Education

From 2000 to 2005, enrollment has dropped in all four school districts serving Graham County. However, increases by all districts were experienced in 2006 – a first indication of the influx of workers to the various communities. All schools report excess capacity to accommodate additional students.

TABLE II-2  
School Enrollment

	2000	2005	Change
Pima	703	646	-8%
Safford	2,819	2,700	-4%
Thatcher	1,336	1,137	-15%
Fort Thomas	568	528	-7%

Source: Growth: A Special Report, Wick Communications, October 25, 2006

Recreation

Recreation, and related tourism activities, is a major lifestyle and economic factor for Graham County. Among the attractions are water sports, game hunting, birding, and an extensive trail system.

With easy access to lakes and rivers, boating and fishing is a popular pastime. River rafting is available in the Gila Box area on the Gila River. Sports enthusiasts can enjoy big and small game hunting for deer, javelina, quail and other wildlife. The tremendous altitude ranges – 2,400 feet to 10,720 feet at Mt. Graham - and habitats from desert to spruce-fir forests attract a variety of bird species. Miles of rivers and streams plus numerous lakes and ponds provide excellent riparian habitat. More than 300 species have been recorded in Graham County.

The Gila Valley Trail System has been developed in partnership with the National Park Service's Rivers and Trail Programs. Discovery Park, including a two mile narrow-gauge railway, provides a glimpse into the historic past of the region as well as the Gov Aker Observatory.

Community Profile: Observations and Issues

*Observations*

- ✓ Historically an agricultural economy, Graham County is transitioning into more regional trade and an educational center.
- ✓ Growth of Phelps Dodge will be a significant economic generator with accompanying need/opportunity for support services.
- ✓ Significant growth of over 55 age group communities is anticipated.

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- ✓ Recreation/tourism will remain a strong factor.
- ✓ Growth is occurring in all three communities, Pima, Safford and Thatcher.
- ✓ Major employers, mining, retail, medical, correctional facilities, and education, will create a challenging need for labor.

*Issues for transportation*

- ✓ Population growth will require increased city/municipal services.
- ✓ Potential traffic congestion on the Highway 70 corridor.
- ✓ Access to job sites will be important for workers.
- ✓ A transit alternative to the single occupant vehicle could be important to mitigating growth issues.

## CHAPTER III: DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS

Generally, transit dependent persons are defined as those individuals who have characteristics that prevent them from driving, leaving public transit as the major motorized form of transportation available to them.

### Transit Dependent Factors

Four census categories provide information about the transit dependent population groups.

- **Elderly Population:** The population 65 years of age and older.
- **Mobility Limited:** A new category in Census 2000 identified the mobility limited. Limited to persons with a “Go outside home disability for civilians not institutionalized over 16 years.”
- **Below Poverty:** Thresholds include, for example, single person, under 65 - \$9,183; family of four - \$18,392.
- **Zero Vehicle Population:** Households reporting zero automobiles.

Transit dependent population characteristics from the Census 2000 were compiled for the cities of Safford, Thatcher, and Pima. Census information is collected in Block Group/Census Tract data sets and reported under the city name. For mapping purposes, these sets may extend beyond the city/town limits. The areas for these Census Blocks is shown in Figure 2 and quantified in Table III-1.

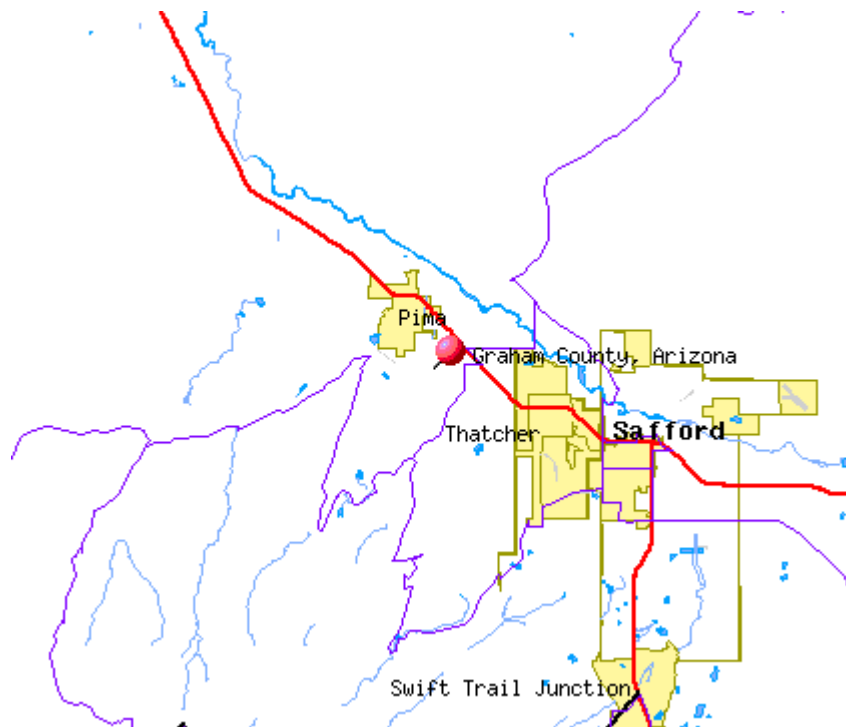


FIGURE 2

*Graham County Transit  
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Transit dependent characteristics were identified for

TABLE III-1  
Transit Dependent Population Factors: City Geographic Area

Sector	Pima	Stafford	Thatcher	City/Town Totals	%	Unicorp. County	%	County Total	%
Total Population	1,989	9,232	4,022	15,243	46%	18,246	54%	33,489	100%
Population by Age									
Under 19	746	3,090	1,562	5,398	35%	6,147	34%	11,545	34%
20 to 64	961	4,596	1,961	7,518	49%	10,437	57%	17,955	54%
65 and Older	282	1,546	499	2,327	15%	1,662	9%	3,989	12%
Mobility Limited	145	531	306	982	6%	642	4%	1,624	5%
Below Poverty	406	1,565	758	2,729	18%	4,223	23%	6,952	21%
Number of Households	726	3,332	1,274	5,332	35%	4,788	26%	10,120	30%
Households/No Vehicle	168	332	24	524	3%	331	2%	855	3%
Population/No Vehicle	460	920	76	1,456	10%	1,261	7%	2,829	8%

Source: Census 2000

*Elderly Population*

Of the total population inside the city/town limits of 15,243 there are 2,327 residents over the age of 65. This represents approximately 15% of the total population. This is slightly higher than national statistics, where the elderly represent 12.5% of the total population.

Elderly populations are typically more transit dependent due to physical and financial limitations associated with retirement incomes. Elderly persons tend to depend more on family, friends, local senior centers or communities of faith to provide transportation as they grow older. They are also more likely to need the services of local transportation providers.

*Limited Mobility Population*

For the first time, Census 2000 identified a specific category for populations with mobility limitation. This category was defined as persons identifying that they had a disability but were able to go outside the home. This excluded persons with a mobility limitation that were institutionalized, for example in a health care facility, or not able to leave the home. Of the total population inside the city/town limits of 15,243, 982 persons were identified with a mobility limitation. This represents 6% of the population in the three cities.

### *Households Below the Poverty Level*

Low income persons tend to depend on transit to a greater extent than persons with more disposable income. Of the total population in the city/town limits of 15,243, there were 2,729 identified as below the poverty level. This represents 18% of the population.

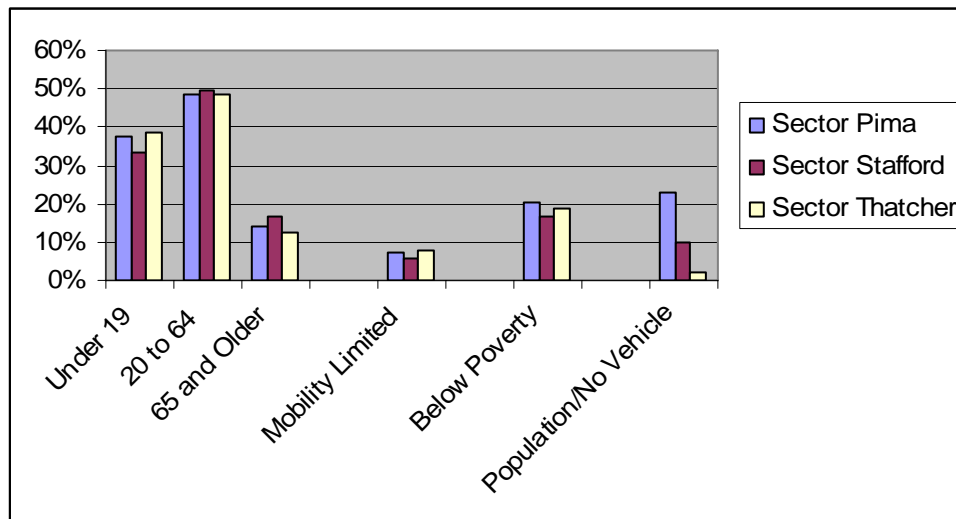
### *Zero Vehicle Population*

The final census category related to transit dependency is the number of households without its own vehicle. This factor could be associated with the economics of owning a car, the physical ability to drive an automobile, or the choice of the person to not drive. Of the total population of 5,332 households, there were 524 households identified as not having access to an automobile.

### Community Characteristics/Study Area

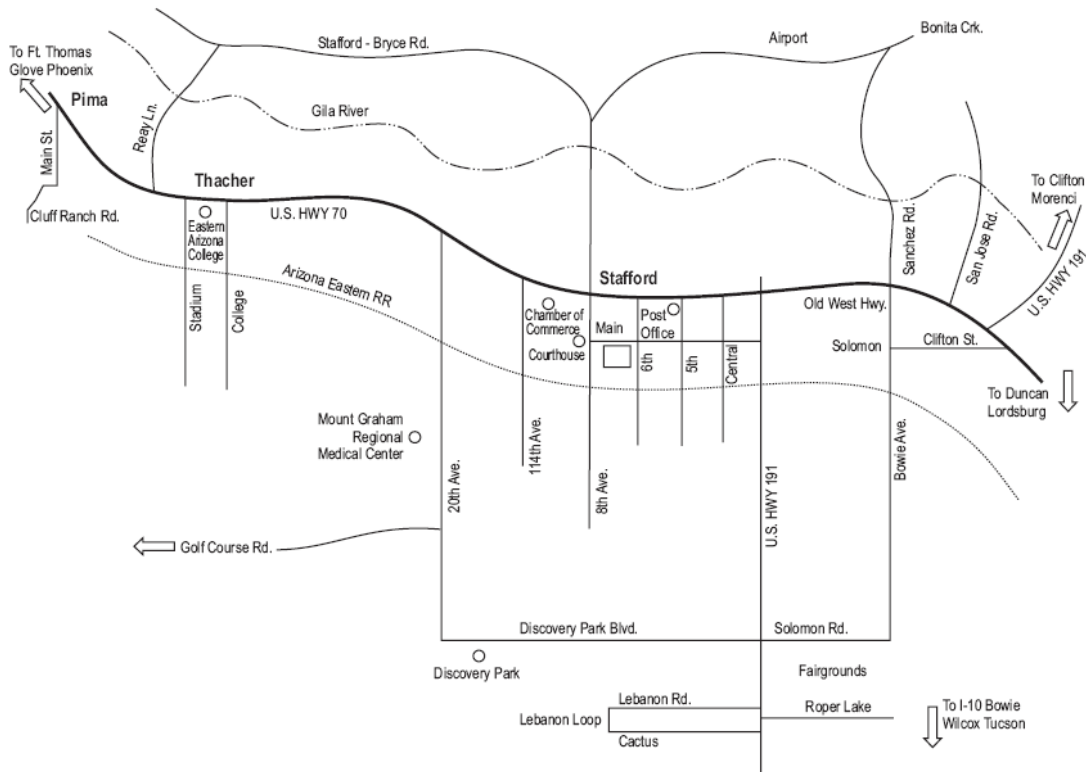
As shown in Table III-2, the demographics characteristics of the three towns are very similar. Population age groups, mobility limited, and low-income groups are within a 5% spread. The one sector where there is a significant difference is the percent of population with no vehicle available. While only 2% of the population in Thatcher lives in a household with no vehicles, 23% of the population in Pima reported living in a household with no vehicles.

TABLE III-2  
Comparison of Community Characteristics



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Based on review of demographic data and discussion with advisory group, it was determined that for this study, the feasibility of providing transit to Graham County will focus on the three communities of Pima, Safford, and Thatcher. Figure 3 identifies this primary study area.



**FIGURE 3**

**Primary Study Area**

Demographic Characteristics: Observations and Issues

*Observations*

- ✓ The three communities have similar population profiles. This supports the perception of the three towns as having similar needs.
- ✓ The elderly population, which is larger than the national average, tends to live in the cities/towns as opposed to the rural areas of Graham County.
- ✓ Mobility limited population is spread throughout the county.
- ✓ Low income population is greater in unincorporated areas of the county.
- ✓ Pima has a larger percentage of population without access to a vehicle.

*Issues for transportation*

- ✓ The needs of the communities are relatively equal.
- ✓ In considering transit, it will be important to provide transportation links along the entire Highway 70 corridor.
- ✓ 46% of the population of Graham County lives in the communities of Pima, Safford, and Thatcher. Focusing on this area will be a reasonable approach to determining if transit is a viable option.

## CHAPTER IV: TRANSIT NEEDS ESTIMATE

Transit planners use a variety of methods to estimate demand for transit services. These include both quantitative and qualitative methods. The quantitative methods are mathematical models based on observed ridership in similar communities. Several of these models have been designed specifically for rural areas and small communities. These techniques provide a ballpark estimate of ridership if effective transit services are provided.

In addition to the quantitative techniques to identify potential ridership, it is equally useful to look at some qualitative factors that could influence the need for transit services. Local stakeholders are often able to identify local situations and provide relevant insight to the community activities that influence the need for transit services.

Actual ridership will depend on the ability to provide effective service as well as the demand. For transit services to meet the demand, they must operate frequently and provide workable connections between trip origins and destinations. Because of geographic or financial constraints, the ability to provide viable transit services varies with each area. As with many community services, it is unrealistic to anticipate that all the identified need will be provided.

### Quantitative Analysis

Demographic data can be used to analyze community mobility needs. Two methods were selected to estimate ridership for Graham County.

- **Survey Research Trip Method:** Developed in 1992 for Mesa County, CO, this method provides separate projections for general, elderly, and mobility limited populations. Factors developed for this model reflect the rural/small urban characteristics of study area.
- **Transit Propensity Method:** A process developed to measure the inclination for transit use by specific market niches indexed by average transit use by these and other groups. Annual trip estimate based on average of trips generated per population by the Survey Research Trip Method multiplied by the Transit Propensity Factor.

Detailed information, including census data factors and formulas used to calculate the transit demand for the study area is available in Appendix A. The standard for reporting transit ridership is as a one-way trip. A round-trip, for example a trip to a medical appointment and back home, would be recorded as two one-way trips.



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Table IV-1 indicates the estimated transit trip need for the study area. Based on the Survey Research Method, approximately 35,000 one-way passenger trips are needed. Over 13,000 additional one-way passenger trips would be generated according to the Transit Propensity Method by these transit dependent populations, for a total of 48,000 annual one-way passenger trips.

TABLE IV-1  
Transit Need Estimate

Survey Research		Pima	Safford	Thatcher	Total
General Pop.		1,620	7,294	3,343	12,257
Elderly		626	3,431	1,107	5,164
Mobility		2,540	9,303	5,361	17,205
		4,786	20,028	9,812	34,626
		Average Riders/Person			2.27
Propensity	Factor				
Low Income	1.04	959	3,697	1,791	6,448
Zero Vehicles	1.10	2,198	4,344	314	6,857
		3,157	8,041	2,105	13,303
Total Rider Estimate		7,944	28,069	11,917	47,929

As mentioned above, the actual number of trips provided by a system each year is dependent on a number of factors including frequency of service, ease of using transit, and overall community support for transit. Table IV-2 provides some benchmarks from the experience of other towns of similar size that are currently providing transit services.

TABLE IV-2  
Peer Group Comparison

Location	Population	Estimated Trips	Trips/ Person	Actual Trips	% of Trips Provided	Hours/ Service	Trips/ Hour
Cottonwood, AZ	23,323	58,995	2.5	34,722	59%	9,588	3.6
Show Low, AZ	24,404	52,378	2.1	85,386	163%	7,416	11.5
Valley/Adams, ID	11,446	30,892	2.7	24,497	79%	4,368	5.6
Bisbee, AZ	6,093	21,897	3.6	36,000	164%	4,463	8.1
Graham County	15,243	47,919	3.1				

A note of caution, the relative performance of these systems has many explanations. For example, Cottonwood, with the fewest trips/hour has a very efficient system that is transitioning from a demand response service to deviated fixed route. Bisbee has recently connected to regional service, increasing ridership. The impact of these types of operational factors will have on Graham County alternatives will be addressed in the discussion of service alternatives.

Qualitative Factors

Other factors that will have a significant impact on the need for transit services in the Graham County study area include:

- The increase in retirement housing will most likely drive additional need for transit services.
- The influx of workers for Phelps Dodge will require attention to the need for employee transportation. Currently, Phelps Dodge is providing bus service from a fenced, lighted parking area in Safford to the Morenci Mine location.
- The concentration of retail and government services from 8<sup>th</sup> to 20<sup>th</sup> Avenues provides a central area of activity that will make the use of transit attractive for many riders.
- There is a significant need for transit services. Currently, the only transit service available to the general public, including the Senior Center, is provided by SEACAP with one vehicle.

## CHAPTER V: STRATEGIES FOR PROVIDING TRANSIT

Before a discussion of possible transit options for Graham County, it will be helpful to establish a baseline of information about the development of transit services. Three primary factors impact all transit services, organizational options, service types, and funding alternatives.

### Organization Alternatives

Eight institutional alternatives have been identified as commonly used to manage rural transit services.

- Department of Local Government
- Intergovernmental Transit Agency
- Metropolitan District
- Regional Service Authority
- Rural Transportation Authority
- Public-Private Partnership
- Private, Non-Profit Corporation
- Private, For-Profit Corporation

Given the multiple jurisdictions and numerous large, active non-profits in the study area, considerable thought must be given to the appropriate placement of the administration and operation of transit services.

### Service Types

While there are several traditionally defined service types, a community can also consider a hybrid of any of these services to best suit local needs. The responsibility for compliance with the Americans With Disabilities Act is an important consideration in selecting the most appropriate service configuration. Traditional types of transit services include:

#### *Fixed Route, Fixed Schedule*

Transit vehicle travels a pre-established route. Passengers are picked up or dropped off at predesignated locations along the route. Customers board a vehicle at specified times on a schedule established by the transit agency.

#### *Commuter Route, Fixed Schedule – Subscription Services*

Fixed route operating with designated stops primarily operated for employee destinations and times, usually over long distances rather than short fixed route. Not subject to ADA compliance.

#### *Fixed Route, Flexible Schedule*

Transit vehicle travels a pre-established route. Passengers are picked up or dropped off at predesignated locations along the route. Schedule changes are permitted with short notice to reflect changing circumstances.

*Intercity Fixed Route, Fixed Schedule*

Transit vehicle travels a pre-established route. Passengers are picked up or dropped off at predesignated location along the route. Customers board a vehicle at specified times on a schedule established by transit agency. Most serve to make connections with airport, other intercity destinations with urban populations of 5,000 or more. Feeder services to intercity connections are included.

*Variable Route, Fixed Schedule*

*Route Deviation:* A vehicle travels a basic fixed route picking up passengers anywhere along the route and will deviate a few blocks from the fixed route to pick up or deliver passengers requiring curb-to-curb service. *Point Deviation:* A vehicle stops at specified checkpoints (shopping centers, libraries, etc.) at specified times but travels a flexible route between these points to serve specific customer requests for curbside pick-up/delivery. Schedules are established by the transportation agency.

*Demand Responsive*

Demand Responsive service is based on passenger request. A passenger contacts a scheduler or dispatcher and requests a ride for a particular date and time. Demand responsive service may operate on a curb-to-curb or door-to-door basis. This service is often referred to as “dial-a-ride.”

Again, these services types are not separate and distinct and should be tailored and modified in response to specific community needs.

Consideration should also be given to the relative productivity of the various types of service. Transit services are often evaluated based on productivity – how many rides are provided for each hour of service provided. Different types of service are expected to provide different levels of productivity. Estimates of these productivity levels are shown below:

<u>Service Type</u>	<u>Average Productivity by Service Type</u>
Dial-a-Ride:	
Countywide Dial-a-Ride	1-2 trips per hour
Rural Town Dial-a-Ride	1-3 trips per hour
Dial-a-Ride Zone	4-8 trips per hour
Fixed Schedule - Rural	6-12 trips per hour
Schedule by service area is established based on resources/rider needs.	
Must be clearly posted and well marketed.	
Examples:	Nutrition Site Meals
	Alternate service days to cover remote, distant locations
Flexible Routes	8-12 trips per hour
Vehicle will deviate on request from route.	
Entry level or precursor service for fixed route.	

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## Service Routes

## Vehicle Capacity

Grouped trips for specific service program.

Specific clients to specific locations, often subscription riders.

Examples:      Shopper Shuttle from Senior Housing

## Adult Daycare/Sheltered Workshops

## Head Start

## Fixed Routes

## Vehicle Capacity

## Fixed routes, timed schedule

Baseline for urban feeder routes: 22 trips per hour

Productivity Estimates from KFH Group, Inc., October 2002

## Funding Alternatives

Securing funding for any public transit service is an on-going challenge. Several Federal Transit Administration grant programs are basic funding sources. Local government/community sources include general funds, in-kind services, and various dedicated taxes. Passenger fares and revenue from contracts are also included in this category. Table V-1 provides an overview of funding sources.

TABLE V-1  
Transit Funding Sources

<b>FEDERAL</b>	Comments
FTA	
5303/5307 Urbanized Formula	Formula Allocation
5309 Capital Discretionary	Capital Fed. Earmark
5310 Elderly/Disabled	Capital: FTA
5311 Non-Urban	Operations/Administration/Capital ADOT/FTA
Welfare to Work	Application
Demonstration Grants	Application
5316 Job Access	ADOT/FTA
5317 New Freedom	ADOT/FTA
Other FTA	Application
Older Americans Act	
Title III	Regional
<b>STATE/REGIONAL</b>	
LTAF-II	Lottery Based
Medicaid	State/Regional
<b>LOCAL</b>	
General Fund	In-Kind
Special Districts	Council/Commission Action
Public/Private Partnerships	
<b>OTHER</b>	
Fare Revenues	Policy
Contract Services	Policy
Advertising	Policy
Other Grants	Application

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The critical factor in providing needed transit services is the development of funding that allows a transit provider to operate reliably and efficiently within a set of clear goals and objectives and to accomplish long and short-range plans. Dependable resources to fund transit service are important in developing reliable service that encourages ridership.

The Safe, Accountable, Flexible, Efficient Transportation Equity Act: A Legacy for Users (SAFETEA-LU) was a six-year bill that stabilizes funding and includes funding increases to many transit programs. SAFETEA-LU provides \$286.4 billion in guaranteed funding for federal surface transportation programs over six years through FY 2009, including \$52.6 billion for federal transit programs. This 46% increase over transit funding guaranteed in TEA 21 includes:

- Significant increase in Section 5310 funding for programs serving elderly and people with disabilities
- Significant increase in funding for rural transit formula program.
- Support for Job Access and Reverse Commute (JARC) funding; changed to formula funding.
- Significant reductions in the local match rates for preventive maintenance, capital purchases, and operating expenses.

In Arizona, the Federal Transit Administration grant programs are administered by the Arizona Department of Transportation – Public Transportation Division.

Other funding in Arizona is available from the Local Transportation Assistance Funds established in 1998 when the State Legislature passed House Bill 2565. This program, called LTAF, assists counties and incorporated communities in Arizona with additional transportation funds based upon a tiered distribution formula during any fiscal year.

The fund initially permitted any transportation use in communities and counties outside Maricopa County, as well as those within the County under 50,000 in population. In 2000, additional legislation was passed making the use of LTAF II funds “transit use only” (public transportation sponsored by a local government entity or special needs transportation) for jurisdictions allocated more than \$2,500.

This legislative change also made it clear that Indian communities could engage in Intergovernmental Agreements with local jurisdictions receiving LTAF II allocations in order to assist tribal governments with their local transit needs. Similarly, private-non-profit agencies have been permitted to apply to local jurisdictions for assistance with their transit operations, effectively making them “second-tier” grant recipients.

## CHAPTER VI: REVIEW OF COMMUNITY INTERESTS/NEEDS

A keystone to developing a feasibility review is a comprehensive process to clearly identify and understand the community environment, local interest and perceived and actual needs for transit services. This foundation will be used to develop alternatives for transit system operations that will then be reviewed by the broader community.

This process got an excellent start with twenty-five local stakeholders attending the initial Transit Advisory Committee meeting. Target dates and work scope were reviewed and modified. Important topics discussed included identification of additional partners and agreement that the study area would focus on the corridor from Safford to Pima. Minutes of this meeting are in Appendix C.

Stakeholder interviews were conducted with representatives of the business, educational institutions, and community service providers. Similar interviews were conducted with the staff of Graham County, Pima, Safford, and Thatcher to get specific community input. Each group was asked to address major needs and stakeholders, issues to be addressed and other comments and concerns. A summary of these interviews is in Appendix D.

Based on this input and the information developed in the community profile, demographic overview, and transit needs estimate, the following issues have been identified:

### Community Environment

#### *Observations*

- ✓ Historically an agricultural economy, Graham County is transitioning into more regional trade and an educational center.
- ✓ Growth of Phelps Dodge will be a significant economic generator with accompanying need/opportunity for support services.
- ✓ Significant growth of over 55 age group communities is anticipated.
- ✓ Recreation/tourism will remain a strong factor.
- ✓ Growth is occurring in all three communities, Pima, Safford and Thatcher.
- ✓ Major employers, mining, retail, medical, correctional facilities, and education, will create a challenging need for labor.

#### *Issues for transportation*

- ✓ Population growth will require increased city/municipal services.
- ✓ Potential traffic congestion on the Highway 70 corridor.
- ✓ Access to job sites will be important for workers.
- ✓ A transit alternative to the single occupant vehicle could be important to mitigating growth issues.

## Local Characteristics

### *Observations*

- ✓ The three communities have similar population profiles. This supports the perception of the three towns as having similar needs.
- ✓ The elderly population, which is larger than the national average, tends to live in the cities/towns as opposed to the rural areas of Graham County.
- ✓ Mobility limited population is spread throughout the county.
- ✓ Low income population is greater in unincorporated areas of the county.
- ✓ Pima has a larger percentage of population without access to a vehicle.

### *Issues for transportation*

- ✓ The needs of the communities are relatively equal.
- ✓ In considering transit, it will be important to provide transportation links along the entire Highway 70 corridor.
- ✓ 46% of the population of Graham County lives in the communities of Pima, Safford, and Thatcher. Focusing on this area will be a reasonable approach to determining if transit is a viable option.

## Perceived/Estimated Needs

- ✓ The increase in retirement housing will most likely drive additional need for transit services.
- ✓ The influx of workers for Phelps Dodge will require attention to the need for employee transportation. Currently, Phelps Dodge is providing bus service from a fenced, lighted parking area in Safford to the Morenci Mine location.
- ✓ The concentration of retail and government services from 8<sup>th</sup> to 20<sup>th</sup> Avenues provides a central area of activity that will make the use of transit attractive for many riders.
- ✓ There is a significant need for transit services. Currently, the only transit service available to the general public, including the Senior Center, is provided by SEACAP with one vehicle.
- ✓ Calculated need for transit services is estimated to be 48,000 annual one-way passenger trips.
- ✓ The need for transit services to various job sites, including Phelps-Dodge mine sites, has not been calculated separately.

The challenge for the Transit Advisory Committee, assisted by the consultant team, will be to identify the organizational alternatives, service types and funding sources that will address the community need for transit services effectively.